

After his confirmation by the Episcopal House of Bishops in Minneapolis on Aug. 5 to be the next bishop of New Hampshire, Rev. V. Gene Robinson left, appeared at a news conference with his daughter, Ella, and his partner of 14 years, Mark Andrew.



# GOD AND THE GAY LIFESTYLE

*Homosexuality seems more and more acceptable to American society.  
Is homosexual behavior suddenly OK?*

by David L. Mahsman

“Gay is hot,” said a recent story in the New York *Daily News*. “The U.S. Supreme Court knocked down an anti-sodomy law in Texas,” it continued. “The TV show ‘Queer Eye for the Straight Guy’ is a smash hit. And Madonna and Britney Spears swapped spit last week at the MTV music awards.”

It certainly appears that homosexuality continues to gain ground as an acceptable “alternative lifestyle” in American society. And this seems true in church as well as in state (or in pop culture).

In August, the Episcopal Church, USA, approved its first-ever openly gay bishop. And while its General Convention declined a proposal to authorize drafting a standard rite for blessing same-sex unions, it did say, “We recognize that local faith communities are operating

within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.”

Is homosexual behavior suddenly OK?

## ‘A momentous break’

Rev. V. Gene Robinson, who is divorced, has two daughters and has been with a male partner for 14 years. A priest for 30 years, he was elected in June by the New Hampshire diocese to be its next bishop and confirmed in August by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

The day after Robinson’s confirmation as bishop, President Gerald Kieschnick of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod released a statement.

“While it is clear from God’s Word that His forgiving love in Jesus Christ is constant for all people,” Kieschnick said, “this action nevertheless constitutes a momentous break from the Christian Church’s 2,000-year-long understanding of what the Holy Scriptures teach about homosexual behavior as contrary to God’s will and the Biblical qualifications for holding the pastoral office.”

The decision, he said, will be “deeply divisive” in the Episcopal Church and the larger Anglican Communion, and it will be controversial throughout Christendom.

“It is my sincere hope that the Episcopal Church, USA, would reconsider their decision in the light of the Biblical understanding of human sexuality and the qualifications for the pastoral office,” Kieschnick said.

He raised the issue again less than a week later as he brought greetings to the biennial Church-wide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which was meeting in Milwaukee.

The ELCA has a “full communion” relationship with the Episcopal Church and is itself confronting very similar issues. The 2005 ELCA assembly will be asked to decide whether or not people in committed homosexual relationships are to be ordained in

that church and whether or not the ELCA should have an official policy on blessing same-sex unions.

“Foremost among the challenges to the church’s witness to the world is remaining faithful to Holy Scripture as we study and respond to some of the great moral issues of the day,” Kieschnick told the ELCA assembly Aug. 13.

Then he referred to what the Episcopalians had done a week earlier and spoke words similar to what he had said about those actions: “I pray that your study of deliberation of this matter will be made in the light of the Biblical understanding of human sexuality and the qualifications for the pastoral office.”

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## Same-sex unions

In a separate statement this summer, Kieschnick spoke also in defense of traditional marriage. The catalysts were two court decisions: one by the U.S. Supreme

*Karen O’Brien Ahlers and Michelle Joanne Blair (pictured here and on the cover) were “married” recently in the First Parish Church of Framingham, Mass. Officiant Troy Liston proclaimed them married, “Through no power invested in me by the state or any religious institution, but instead through the power invested in me by your family, friends and the two of you, and, in defiance of current interpretation of the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.” The supreme court of Massachusetts is debating gay marriage. A ruling is expected at any time.*



Court, declaring unconstitutional a Texas anti-sodomy law; the other, in Canada, an Ontario court ruling that overturned the definition of marriage there as the union of a man and a woman.

“There is a principle in the legal profession that, when translated from the Latin, says: ‘The law also teaches.’ What concerns many Christians about these two recent court decisions is that the law helps to shape public morality,” Kieschnick said. “What concerns us is whether these and similar laws, by their capacity to teach and shape, will lead our society to re-think its definitions of marriage and family.”

Kieschnick said he could support a proposed constitutional amendment that would ban homosexual marriage. The proposed amendment would state that “marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman.”

By contrast, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien has declared his determination to make same-sex “marriages” legal throughout his country.

Said Kieschnick in his statement:

“According to the Scriptures and to centuries of traditional law, homosexual marriages are condemned as being aberrant, against the will of God and ‘unnatural.’ By God’s design, marriage has always meant the union of ‘bride’ and ‘groom’ (gender-specific terms) — which are then ‘wife’ and ‘husband,’ ‘mother’ and ‘father,’ of the family.

“This is not just Christian thinking, an attempt to foist Christian morality on a pluralistic society. Marriage, at all times and in all civilizations, has always meant the union of a man and a woman in a permanent relationship. The institution is trans-cultural, trans-religious, trans-historical.

“To tinker with its meaning, to change the fundamental vocabulary of what ‘marriage’ has meant throughout the history of the world, is to eat away at the edges of



*Homosexuality has achieved a high profile in America, especially in the entertainment media. One of television’s biggest hits during the past summer was “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” a program featuring five gay men who give a makeover to a heterosexual man.*

*Homosexual behavior, like any sin, can be forgiven. That’s quite a different thing, of course, than to say that such behavior is OK.*

our society. It is to threaten the very center of that society—the family unit—through which society is continued and new life comes into being.

“The essential differences between a man and a woman are many and profound. Yet God has instituted loving marriage to integrate these differences into a whole that is far greater than the sum of its parts. This amazing whole is essential for raising children—with both a mother and a father. In fact, children instinctively yearn for both a male and female role model. God’s divine plan for a family is just that—mother, father and children—not a father/father or mother/mother arrangement. Same-sex marriages are thus an affront to the very human nature God, our Creator, gave us.

“Granting the status of marriage to same-sex unions requires that we sacrifice the timeless meanings of marriage and family for the sake of sexual freedom. It is the wrong

choice to make, and yet it is precisely the choice that our society—the voters, courts, Congress and even the churches—may be asked to make. I pray we think about what is at stake before stepping onto the slippery slope of same-sex marriage.”

### **‘A categorical prohibition’**

The ordination of gay and lesbian clergy and same-sex unions are controversial issues in the Episcopal Church, as well as in the ELCA and in a number of other

Christian churches.

This is reflected, for example, in a letter written by Episcopal Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold to the bishops of his church following Robinson's election in New Hampshire. Griswold noted, "Great joy and deep distress are emotions being felt by many within our church. Some view the election as prophetic and an action of the Holy Spirit, while others view it as disregarding Scripture, Tradition and the larger view of the Anglican Communion ...."

The Missouri Synod has its own disagreements and controversies, of course. But what the Bible says about homosexuality—and the conviction that Scripture is the final authority on the matter—isn't one of them.

Over the years, the Synod has adopted convention resolutions that speak to the issue; the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) included a section on homosexuality in its 1981 report, "Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective"; and a presidential task force in 1999 published "A Plan for Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families."

"Homosexuality comes under a categorical prohibition in the Old and New Testaments (Lev. 18:22, 24; 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 1 Tim. 1:9–10)," says the CTCR report. It says, "In discussing the sins which follow upon man's refusal to honor God as Creator of all things (Rom. 1:26–32), the apostle Paul singles out the sins of homosexual behavior for special comment. Such behavior comes under God's judgment not because it is any more heinous than the 21 vices listed in 1:29–31, but because it, too, illustrates man's rebellion against his Creator."

Likewise, a 2001 convention resolution that commends the 1999 ministry plan to the Synod's congre-

gations "as a resource for study and a guide for pastoral care" notes that "the law of God declares homosexual lust and activity to be sin and contrary to the created order" (Rom. 1:24–27).

But neither the CTCR report nor convention resolutions leave the matter with words of condemnation.

"While not minimizing the threat of God's wrath against all forms of enslavement to sin, the church needs to recognize in its efforts to help the homosexual that all people are born in need of deliverance from the effects which sin has imposed on their lives," says the CTCR.

The 2001 convention resolution, after noting that Scripture says homosexual activity constitutes sin against God, also reminds us that:

- "The Gospel declares that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2) and that Christ, who knew no sin, was made to be our sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21)."
- "The church's proper evangelical work is to proclaim the reconciliation of the sinner to God in the death of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:18–19)."
- "Holy Baptism leads us to daily contrition and repentance for all our sins of thought, word, and deed, in which the 'old Adam' is drowned anew each day, so that a new person, forgiven and restored by Christ's death and resurrection, daily rises and comes forth to live before God in Christ's righteousness and purity forever."

Homosexual behavior, like any sin, can be forgiven. That's quite a different thing, of course, than to say that such behavior is OK.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY ...

**T**he Family Ministry unit of the Synod's Board for District and Congregational Services provides a variety of articles, Web links and resources dealing with homosexuality and other issues. To find them, go on the Web to <http://dcs.lcms.org/?s=family>, click on the button labeled "Timely Topics" and look for "homosexuality."

Two resources cited in the article on these pages also are available online. They are:

- **Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective**, a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, [www.lcms.org/ctcr/docs/sxty-01.html](http://www.lcms.org/ctcr/docs/sxty-01.html).
  - **A Plan for Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families**, [www.lcms.org/president/pdf/minhomfam.pdf](http://www.lcms.org/president/pdf/minhomfam.pdf).
- The following resources may also be ordered from Concordia Publishing House at [www.cph.org](http://www.cph.org):
- **Love, Sex, and God** — Item Number: 14-2117
  - **Human Sexuality** — Item Number: 14-2119
  - **Report on Human Sexuality** — Item Number: 09-2426
  - **Christian Perspective: Homosexuality** — Item Number: 20-2586
  - **5-Minute Bible Studies: Contemporary Issues** — Item Number: 20-2722
  - **Lifelines of Love** — Item Number: 12-4168



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# THE CHRISTIAN'S STRUGGLE WITH

## Sexual Temptation

*“Gay” or “straight,” sin is sin.  
But God has not left us to struggle alone.*

by Charles L. Manske

**T**he struggle is difficult for many who take their discipleship to Christ as primary and yet struggle with their sexual identity. Am I a child of Christ, or am I at the whims of my biological and psychological inheritance?

Some Christian homosexuals try to rationalize, “If God created us to be homosexuals, it is not our fault—and it is OK to practice what God has ordained us to be.”

Wrong answer!

Using the same logic, heterosex-

uals also could reason that since we find ourselves enslaved in sin and easy prey to sexual temptation, it must be God’s will for us to continue in our heterosexual sins.

God has created us to live in relationship with *Him*. But we cannot do so because we are caught in our own web of actual and original sin. In our own self-centeredness, we choose sexual and other carnal sins that separate us from God and His family.

Whether we come by our “sexual orientation” by biological inheritance (nature) or environmental

conditioning (nurture)—whether by birth or by choice—homosexual and heterosexual sins alike are wrong before God. Both need the forgiveness that is ours in Jesus Christ. Do not rationalize your sexual sins as being acceptable before the throne of God the Father.

And yet, the picture of Christ in the New Testament is not one of a judge of sexual indiscretions, but of One who has empathy for those who have not met the letter of God’s Law. When Christ meets the woman caught in adultery, He does not admonish her but her accusers. To

the holy men of the community, Christ says, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7).

How then should the Christian Church minister in the name of Christ?

Henri Nouwen was a celibate Roman Catholic priest who continually dealt with the temptation of homosexuality. Author of more than 40 books, former teacher at Harvard University, popular speaker, and a servant and advocate for the poor and dispossessed in South America and Canada, he struggled secretly all of his life over his homosexual inclinations.

Nouwen sought counseling from a center that ministered to homosexual men and women. As Philip Yancey describes it in *Soul Survivor* (Doubleday, 2001):

1. “He could remain a celibate priest and ‘come out’ as a gay man, which would at least release the secret he bore in anguish.
2. “He could declare himself, leave the priesthood, and seek a gay companion.
3. “He could remain a priest publicly and develop private gay relationships. Nouwen carefully weighed each course and rejected it. Any public confession of his identity would hurt his ministry, he feared. The last two options seemed impossible for one who had taken a vow of celibacy, and who looked to the Bible and to Rome for guidance on sexual morality.
4. “Instead, he decided to keep living with the wound. Again and again, he decided.”

The four choices are not only before Henri Nouwen. The choices are before those who struggle with sexual temptations but who wish to continue to be disciples of the Savior. What are we to do?

The first answer is to stop trying to justify your sins before God:

- Don’t tell God that your wish to sin is more important than the blueprint for Christian living that we find in the Bible.
- Don’t pretend that your sexual needs are more important than God’s commands.
- Don’t pretend that your need to practice your lust on your sexual preferences is more important than God’s plan of sexual monogamy in Christian marriage.
- Don’t pretend that living with a partner replaces God’s plan for marriage and the nurturing of children within heterosexual marriage.

God knows you inside out. He knows when you are pretending to be something you are not. He knows when you are trying to rewrite the Bible according to your sexual needs. He knows the games you are playing with Him, and He is unhappy with it.

God gave you life. God offers you the plan that assures that you will be living in heaven with Him forever. *Your plan* does not work. Face It. You need to be in *His plan*, or you miss being with Him in heaven ... forever.

The Good News is that God provides an acceptable way for either the homosexual or the heterosexual who is struggling with his or her sexual identity. It is not up to us to turn around our fallen biological inheritance or our environmental conditioning. We could not do it by ourselves anyway, no matter how hard we try. So God provides the only way it can be done — through His Son, Jesus Christ. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19).

(Read “Searching Scripture,” page 23, for more insights on this topic.)

The Redeemer comes to us as the servant on the cross who died there for all our sins. He comes to us as the triumphant risen Savior who has conquered death and the grave. He forgives us free and

*Don’t pretend that living with a partner replaces God’s plan for marriage and the nurturing of children within heterosexual marriage.*

clear. Our sexual sins are forgiven once and for all. We are no longer slaves of what we were; but we are what we are — forgiven by our Savior and on our way to His home in heaven forever.

The struggles with sex will continue as long as you live. Whether you are self-centered or Christ-centered will be a struggle as long as life continues here on earth. But you now know who you are and to Whom you belong.

If you are a gay person, God can restore you to be the new person that He created and redeemed you to be. Look to the cross for forgiveness, repent of your past and look to the power of the resurrection through which the Holy Spirit can bring about the miracle of a new birth.

Rejoice in the new identity that you have in Christ. No longer are we slaves to our sexual urges, but we are free to be citizens in our future home in heaven, a home we can begin to experience here on earth. For the kingdom of God begins in this life and continues forever.



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